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ENGLISH SHORT STORIES FOR  
ELEMENTARY LEVEL

# THE STAR-CHILD



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## Chapter: one: The Baby

One winter night in a big forest of pine trees, two woodcutters were walking home. It was very, very cold and there was snow on the ground. The trees were cold, the birds were cold and the animals were cold. The rabbits stayed in their rabbit holes and the squirrels stayed in the trees.

But the two woodcutters continued their journey. They prayed to Saint Martin the protector of travelers and finally they saw the lights of their little village in the distance. They were very happy and laughed. The Earth now seemed like a flower of silver and the moon seemed like a flower of gold.

But soon they became sad again. "Why were we so happy?" asked one woodcutter. "Life is for rich people, not poor people like us. It is better if we die in the snow or if a wild animal eats us."

Suddenly, something very strange happened. A very bright and beautiful star fell from the sky into the snow.

"Look," said one of the woodcutters to his friend, "perhaps we will find a pot of gold. Let's go and see!"

When they arrived they found a thing of gold on the white snow. But it wasn't the treasure they wanted. It was a golden cloak with golden stars on it. They opened the cloak and inside they saw a little baby, sleeping. Round the baby's neck was a chain of amber.

"This is not good," said one of them. "Let's leave the baby here. We have too many children and not enough money to buy food. I don't want another child."

"But we can't leave this little baby here alone." said the other woodcutter.

"He will surely die. I will take him home with me. We have many children and not enough food, but my wife will look after him." And the good woodcutter took the baby in his arms and continued his journey home.

When they arrived at their village the first woodcutter said, "You have the child so you must give me the cloak of gold."

But his friend answered, "No, this cloak is not yours or mine. It is the baby's cloak. It must stay with him."

The woodcutter's wife was very happy to see her husband. She put her arms round him and kissed him.

"I found something in the forest and I brought it home for you," he said.

"Good, what is it? We are very poor and we need many things." But she was very angry when she saw the baby. "We have too many children already and not enough money to buy food. I don't want another child," she said. But then she looked at the baby and her heart was full of pity.

"He is a Star-Child," said her husband. "We must love him." So the woman put the baby in a little bed to sleep. She put the cloak and the chain into a chest. "Yes, we will love him," she answered.

## Chapter Two: The Mother

The Star-Child lived with the woodcutter and his family but he was very different from them. Every year the Star-Child became more beautiful: his skin was white like ivory, his hair was gold like the daffodils, his lips were like the petals of a red flower and his eyes were blue like the violets near a river. The other people in the village had black hair and black eyes and they watched the Star-Child in wonder. The Star-Child was very beautiful but very cruel, arrogant and selfish.

He laughed at the other children in the village and said, "Your parents are poor but I am noble, I come from a star." He had no pity for poor people. He laughed at ugly people and ill people. He hurt animals and he laughed when they suffered. He was very vain and loved his beauty. In summer he often went to the well in the priest's orchard and looked at the reflection of his face in the water. Then he was happy.

The woodcutter and his wife treated the boy well but they were very sad.

They often said to him, "We were good to you. We felt pity for you. Why are you so cruel? Why do you act in this way?" The priest was very worried and said to him, "You must respect all

God's creatures

! Even the fly is your brother. Why do you cause pain to others?"

But the Star-Child didn't listen. He continued to hurt animals and laugh at the problems of other people. The other children followed him because he was beautiful and could dance and make music. They followed his orders.

He was their leader and they became cruel and hard like him. One day a poor beggar woman arrived in the village. Her clothes were very old and torn and she had no shoes on her feet. She was very tired and sat under a tree to rest. The Star-Child saw her and said to his friends, "Look at that ugly woman. We don't want her here," and they started to throw stones at the poor woman. She was terrified but she didn't stop looking at the Star-Child.

"What are you doing?" shouted the woodcutter when he saw this. "Stop immediately. Why do you have no pity for this poor woman?"

"I will not listen to you. You are not my father," replied the Star-Child.

"This is true, but when I found you in the forest I had pity for you."

The old woman was listening and when she heard these words she screamed and fainted. The woodcutter carried her into his house and his wife put meat and drinks on the table for her. But she did not eat or drink.

She asked, "Did this child come from the forest? Did he have a gold cloak with stars on it? Did this happen about ten years ago?"

The woodcutter was very surprised. "Yes," he replied.

"And did he have an amber chain round his neck?"

"Yes he did," said the woodcutter. "Come with me and I will show you the cloak and the chain."

"The woman looked at these things and started to cry with joy. "He is my little son. I am his mother," she said. "I lost him in the forest ten years ago and I looked all over the world for him. Now I have him again." The woodcutter was very surprised and called the boy. "Come into the house and you will find your mother."

The Star-Child was very happy and ran in but when he saw her he said,

"Where is my mother? I can see no-one, only a horrible beggar woman."

"I am your mother," she said.

"You are mad. I am not your son: you are dressed in old clothes, you are a beggar woman and I am a Star-Child!"

"But I recognized you when I saw you and I recognized your cloak of gold and your chain of amber. Robbers stole you from me. Come to me, my son.

Your love is very important for me." She opened her arms to him but he was very angry and closed the doors of his heart to her.

The woman cried. "Kiss me before I go because I travelled all over the world and I suffered much to find you."

"Never. You are very ugly. I prefer to kiss a toad or a snake."

The woman stood up and went out of the house. She was crying very much. The Star-Child was very happy when she went. He then went to play with his friends.

## Part Three: The Punishment

The Star-Child went to his friends but when they saw him they laughed at him. "We don't want to play with you now because you're ugly," they said.

"Why do they say these things to me?" he thought. He went to the well to look at his reflection. He was different now: he had a face like a toad and skin like a snake.

Then the Star-Child understood and started to cry. "This is my punishment," he said. "I am very cruel and my mother suffered. Now I must find her and say sorry."

The woodcutter's little daughter said to him, "It's not important if you're ugly. Please stay. I will not laugh at you."

"No, this is my punishment," he replied. "I treated my mother very badly and now I must find her."

He ran into the forest calling, "Mother! Mother! I'm sorry, please come back." All day he called but nobody answered. When night came he slept on a bed of leaves, but when the animals saw him they ran away. They knew that he was a cruel boy.

He said to the mole, "You can go under the ground. Tell me if my mother is there?"

"I don't know if your mother is there. I cannot see because you hurt my eyes," replied the mole.

He said to a little bird, "You can fly over the trees. Tell me if you can see my mother."

"I don't know if your mother is there. I cannot fly because you hurt my wings," replied the bird.

He saw a little squirrel and asked, "Where is my mother?"

"I don't know," replied the squirrel. "You killed my mother. Do you want to kill your mother too?"

The Star-Child heard all these things and he cried and prayed to God to forgive him. He travelled to many different villages to find his mother, and the children of these villages laughed at him and threw stones at him.

Nobody had pity for the Star-Child.

## Part Four: Three Pieces of Gold

For three years the Star-Child walked around the world but he didn't find his mother. One day he arrived at the gates of a city near a river with a big wall around it. The soldiers there stopped him. "What are you doing here?" they asked.

"I'm looking for my mother," he said. "Please let me pass. Perhaps she is in this city."

"Who is your mother and why are you looking for her?" asked another soldier.

"She is a poor beggar like me and I was very cruel to her. Now I want her pardon."

But the soldiers laughed. "You are very ugly. No mother loves an ugly child. She will not be happy to see you. Come with us. We will sell you to be a slave."

They sold the Star-Child to an old man for the price of a cup of sweet wine. This old man was a magician from Libya. The Magician took the boy to a dark prison and gave him a piece of old bread and some dirty water. The next day he said, "Now you must go into the forest. In the forest there are three pieces of gold: one is of white gold, one is of yellow gold and the other is of red gold. You are my slave and if you do not bring me the piece of white gold I will beat you one hundred times."

So the Star-Child went to the forest to look for the white gold but he found only many thorns and dangerous plants. He could not find the white gold anywhere. When the sun started to disappear the boy started to cry. He knew that the Magician wanted to beat him. Suddenly he heard a cry of pain and saw a little hare in a trap. He forgot his problems. He felt pity for the hare and opened the trap.

"Thank you, you are very kind," said the hare. "Thanks to you I have my freedom. What can I give you?"

"I must find a piece of white gold for the Magician. If I don't take it to him he will beat me."

"I will help you," said the hare. "I know where to find the white gold." He took the Star-Child to a tree and in the tree he found the gold. The Star-Child

was very happy and thanked the hare.

He returned to the city. But at the city gate he saw an old man. This old man was very ill and very poor.

"Give me some money. If you don't give me some money I will die of hunger!" shouted the old man. The Star-Child felt pity for the old man but he only had the piece

of white gold for the Magician. "The old man needs the money more than me," thought the Star-Child and gave him the gold.

The Magician was very angry when he saw that the Star-Child didn't have the gold and he beat the boy. He put him in prison with no food and no water.

The next day the Magician said, "Today you must return to the forest and find the piece of yellow gold. If you do not do this I will beat you three hundred times." The boy went into the forest and looked for the gold. He looked all day long but he could not find it. Finally he sat under a tree and started to cry. The hare heard him and asked, "Why are you crying?"

"I must find the piece of yellow gold. If I don't find it the Magician will beat me."

"Follow me. I will show you the yellow gold," said the hare and he took the Star-Child to a pool of water. At the bottom of this pool he found the piece of yellow gold.

The Star-Child returned to the city but at the city gate he saw the old man again.

"Give me some money. If you don't give me money I will die of hunger!" he shouted. The Star-Child felt pity for the old man and gave him the gold.

The Magician was very angry. "What!? No gold? No gold, no food and no water!" He beat the Star-Child and put chains on him and put him in prison again.

The next day the Magician said, "Today you must return to the forest and find the piece of red gold. If you find it, you will be free. If you do not find it, I will kill you." The boy went into the forest and all day long he looked for the gold but he could not find it. In the evening he sat under a tree and started to cry. The hare heard him and asked, "Why are you crying?" The Star-Child explained everything and again the hare helped him. This time he found the gold in a cave near the tree.

"Thank you, thank you," said the boy and he ran back to the city. At the city gate he saw the old man. "Give me some money. If you don't give me money, I will die!" he shouted. The Star-Child felt pity for the old man and gave him the gold. "You need it more than me," he said, but he was very sad and his heart was very heavy. "The Magician will kill me," he thought.

But when he passed the guards at the city gates they bowed to him and said, "Look at our beautiful Lord!" The Star-Child walked through the city and more and more people followed him. They all said, "He is the most beautiful boy in the world." But the Star-Child was very sad, "They are laughing at me," he thought. He walked for a long time and finally arrived in a big square where there was a king's palace. The people said, "You are our Lord, the son of our king!"



"I am not a king's son. I am the son of a poor beggar woman. Why do you say that I am beautiful? I know I am very ugly."

"Why do you say that you are ugly? Look!" said a soldier. The Star-Child looked into the soldier's shield. The shield was silver like a mirror. There he saw his face and saw that his face was beautiful like before.

"There is a prophecy," said the people, "that on this day our king will come. You are our king. Take this crown and this scepter. Govern us with justice and with mercy."

"No, I am a bad boy," he replied. "I must find my mother, I cannot accept the crown and the scepter."

He turned towards the city gate. In the crowd he saw his mother, the beggar woman. Then next to her he saw the old man from the city gate. He ran to the woman, knelt in front of her and kissed her feet.

"Mother I am so sorry. Please forgive me. Once I gave you my hatred. Please give me your love now."

But the woman didn't speak. The Star-Child spoke to the old man. "Please, I helped you three times. Please tell my mother to speak to me."

But the old man didn't speak. The Star-Child started to cry. "Please forgive me, Mother. Please forgive me."

The woman put her hand on the boy's head and said, "Stand up." The old man put his hand on the boy's head too. When the Star-Child stood up he saw that the beggar woman was a queen and the old man was a king. The queen said to him, "This is your father. You helped him three times." And the king said to him. "This is your mother. You washed her feet with your tears."

The boy hugged them and kissed them both. They took him to the palace and they put a crown on his head and a scepter in his hand.

He was a very good king and showed justice and mercy to everyone. He sent gifts to the woodcutter and his family. He helped poor people, he was kind to the animals and birds and there was peace in all the land.

Unfortunately he died after three years because he suffered a lot in his life and the next king was a cruel king.

- THE END -

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